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ABSTRACT

The monograph presents a variety of language arts teaching ideas for use with gifted students. Teachers are encouraged to expose children to much literature including poetry, folk tales, riddles, fairy tales, "pourquoi" tales, myths and legends, fantasy, science fiction, and biographies and autobiographies. The document offers the SIMMER theory of creativity which stresses Stimulation, Immersion, Meditation, Mediation, Evolution, and Response. Examples of children's creative thinking and writing are offered and activities involving concrete poetry are suggested. Sixteen books to develop verbal gifts are recommended. Also provided are nine references. (DB)

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# Reading, Writing, and "Rhythmetics" for the Verbally Gifted

A Monograph Prepared for the
Leadership Accessing Program

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# Introduction

Language arts experiences for the verbally gifted pave the way to the world of ideas and aesthetic experience in literature, and to the expression of creative ideas through writing, speaking, and drama. This monograph presents a wealth of ideas about working with gifted students in the language arts. The author, Barbara Pilon, has had years of experience in working with gifted students and her knowledge of children's literature is extensive. Thus, she brings to the monograph the special expertise which produces a a wealth of good ideas for teachers.

# Brief Biography of the Author

Dr. A. Barbara Pilon is Professor of English at Worcester State College. She received her Bachelor's degree from Brown University, a Master's in Education from Rhode Island College, and her Ph.D. from Indiana University. At Worcester State College, she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in language arts for the gifted. She initiated and coordinated Master's and C.A.G.S. programs in Language Arts/Reading with an emphasis on the gifted at Worcester State College. She established and directed gifted child programs at both Worcester State College and in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Dr. Pilon is the author of books, chapters of monographs, and articles for the verbally gifted child. Books she has published include *Concrete is Not Always Hard* and *Teaching Language Arts Creatively in the Elementary Grades*. She is also editor of professional book reviews for the *Gifted Child Quarterly* and is a nationally renowned consultant on the gifted. She has been involved actively in the National Association for Gifted Children for over 20 years and is currently on the Executive Board. She has served as secretary for NAGC and is currently recording secretary for the board.

# Reading, Writing, and "Rhythmetics" for the Verbally Gifted

The following components should be included in a literature program for verbally gifted students:

Poetry
Folk tales
Riddles (often a component of folk and fairy tales)
Fairy tales
"Pourquoi" tales ("Why" tales, such as the *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling)
Myths and legends
Fantasy
Science fiction
Biographies and autobiographies

Since teachers need to know and present literature that speaks to the emotional and social levels of gifted children, they must be readers themselves. They must be able to stimulate a love of reading. Their enthusiasm should be contagious! The goal is to create what might be called a "dis-ease" in youngsters, so that they will become word, language, and book addicts.

Teachers must also know and present to pupils literary selections that contain either implicit or explicit invitations to creative expression. It takes training to recognize some of the implicit invitations in literary selections. If verbally gifted youngsters are expected to express themselves creatively and effectively, they must be provided with excellent models.

Writing comes more easily if children listen to much literature, discuss it, read it, and are prepared for it. Guilford (1967), writing about what kinds of literature should be used to stimulate creative expressions, says:

> In part, whether the reading material stimulates productive thinking on the part of the reader will depend upon the nature of the material. The teacher can therefore encourage pupils to think in response to their reading by selecting the more provocative materials. Does the material stir the imagination of the reader, and does it leave something for the reader to do? (p. 154).

## SIMMER

In addition to the criteria Guilford sets forth, other considerations are essential if productive thinking and creative products are to occur. One of these is adherence to the belief in what I call the "SIMMER" theory of creativity:

*S*timulation
*I*mmersion
*M*editation
*M*ediation
*E*volution
*R*esponse

These components are both interactive and ongoing. "SIMMER" also implies an incubation. Merriam (1962), in one of her poems, *A Lazy Thought*, reminds her readers that, "It takes a lot of slow to grow" (p. 20). We should not forget that wise admonition. We should not expect children, or ourselves, to be able to compose a wonderful poem or story or anything else between 1:45 and 2:15 p.m.

Another critical point for teachers concerns the concept of the three "R's." Many adults were raised on what someone has referred to as the "ram, rote, and regurgitation" method of teaching. My version of the three "R's" offers quite a different philosophy:

Recognize creative responses.
Reinforce creative responses.
Refuel them so children's fires will always be lit.

A frequently asked question about stimulating creativity in the verbally gifted is: How do I begin? In his poem, *Miss T.*, Walter de la Mare states that, "Whatever Miss T. eats/turns into Miss T." And so it is with our students. Whatever we feed them becomes part of them. First of all, this means offering literary selections they can puzzle over and wonder about, discover and discuss. Secondly, teachers can do warm-ups, mental push-ups, brainstorming, and hitchhiking exercises. Finally, teachers must allow time for experimentation, for children can only learn by doing.

As a child, do you remember playing with a kaleidoscope? Imagine turning a kaleidoscope that has only one snowflake in it. After the sole snowflake has settled, the design will not be very stimulating. But if the kaleidoscope is filled with snowflakes and shaken, the chances for getting an exciting and different design increase dramatically. That same thing can be said for the learning materials we offer our students. The more we give them to work with, the greater their chances of creating exciting and different patterns of thought and expression. My experience with Paul is a case in point.

Some time ago, when I had been working for a few years in a verbally gifted child center at Worcester State College, the mother of one of my pupils requested

that I work with her eight-year-old son. He was failing in all of the language arts at school, although the mother believed he was a capable child. I consented, and Paul came to see me. After putting Paul at ease, I asked him if he would like to read for me. Paul commented, "Actually, I don't think one can determine validly how well one reads by listening to one read orally." Thus, I decided to read to him. The book, *Fortunately*, by Remy Charlip (1964), encourages children to participate actively by anticipating responses and then chiming in.

*Fortunately* relates the adventures of a young boy, Ned. Through a series of fortunate and unfortunate incidents, Ned finally is able to arrive at a surprise birthday party in his honor. The structure in this story is splendid:

> Fortunately, one day, Ned got a letter that said, "Please come to a Surprise Party." But unfortunately, the party was in Florida and he was in New York. Fortunately, a friend loaned him an airplane. Unfortunately, the motor exploded. Fortunately, there was a parachute in the airplane. Unfortunately, there was a hole in the parachute.

By this time, Paul could not restrain himself any longer and piped out, "Fortunately, I had some bubble gum!"

Then I introduced Paul to a paperback entitled *Riddle Riot*, by Mike Thaler (1975). *Riddle Riot* consists of two-page spreads with the answer from the previous riddle on the left side and a new riddle posed on the right side. This structure allows the reader to think about the answer and offer solutions. There are different sections in this little book, and the first riddle I asked Paul came from a section called "Pigiddles." The riddle asked, "What pig did Shakespeare write a play about?" Paul began ruminating and reciting under his breath, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*," and then he exploded, "It's got to be *Hamlet*!" And, indeed, that is the answer that Thaler had provided.

I did only one more riddle with Paul, a riddle from a section entitled "Nationiddles." The riddle was, "What nation has the most sharks?" The answer that Thaler chose was "Finland." Paul's quick response was "Czechlososharkia." Then Paul said, "Of course, we could ask what *state* had the most sharks and the answers could be, New Jawsey and Connecticut."

It is important to notice Paul's sense of humor, his word play, divergence, fluency, and flexibility, all characteristics of a verbally gifted person.

By this time, Paul was really warmed-up and, with his eyes sparkling, he declared, "I have a riddle for you." As teachers, this is the response we hope for when we use thought-tickling selections with children. I will deceive you a little phonetically, when I repeat his riddle, because it should be presented orally. You will observe when you see Paul's answer that he was hitchhiking on the riddle he had just heard. He asked, "What nation has the most 'shocking' leader?" His answer was, "Iran." Now, remember the three R's. First, we need to *recognize* a creative answer

and then we must *reinforce* it. But if it *is* a divergent answer, we may need some time to recognize it. If you cannot recognize the answer, ask for an explanation, and then reinforce it. We must remember that most of us learn very quickly *not* to do those things for which reinforcement is not forthcoming. I had to ask for an explanation, and Paul was delighted to give me one. He wrote for me on a piece of paper, "What nation has the most 'shah-king' leader?"

Paul's story ends happily. He entered our gifted child program and did extremely well. The comments he had been receiving in his own school are all too familiar: "Paul does not finish his work; Paul does not pay attention; Paul makes inappropriate comments; Paul distracts others from their work;" etc. But we must examine the curriculum to which Paul was subjected. He was reading in a third-grade basal even though he had read most of Shakespeare's plays! (I always thought a "basal" meant a place to start from, but from my experience basals seem to go from womb to tomb. I have decided that if there are basals after death, I am not going!) Paul was being given meaningless skills that killed his interest and enthusiasm; he did not need the skills since he had already mastered them. He was being given nothing that nurtured his gifts. The unfortunate fact is that the talents of many children like Paul atrophy and die if they are not discovered and rescued from such a sterile and unrewarding environment.

Once the attributes of a verbally gifted child are evident, informal assessments can be made initially and a formal test can be administered later, if necessary. A classic book that offers some simple ways to assess a person's creativity is *Creativity and Intelligence* (Getzels and Jackson, 1962). One of the suggestions is to present a picture to students and have them write a paragraph based on the picture. Among the examples of responses presented in the book are two that demonstrate the difference between the response of the high IQ subject and that of a high creative subject:

**The high IQ subject:**

Mr. Smith is on his way home from a successful business trip. He is very happy and he is thinking about his wonderful family and how glad he will be to see them again. He can picture it, about an hour from now, his plane landing at the airport and Mrs. Smith and their three children all there welcoming him home again.

**The high creative subject:**

This man is flying back from Reno where he has just won a divorce from his wife. He couldn't stand to live with her anymore, he told the judge, because she wore so much cold cream on her face at night that her head would skid across the pillow and hit him in the head. He is now contemplating a new skid-proof face cream (p. 39).

The following piece of writing was created by an elementary grade pupil. Try to determine whether or not this child is creative:

**The Discovery of Doughnuts**

The most interesting thing about the discovery of doughnuts is that they were never discovered at all! This is how it happened. Once upon a time, there was a 'hole' manufacturer whose name was Angelo Apice. Angelo manufactured holes of every size, shape, and depth. He manufactured gopher holes and sold them three for $1. He also sold bullet holes, shell holes, moth holes, and well holes. He even manufactured cavities for people's teeth. After a while business got bad and Angelo found himself in a big hole! Things got worse and Apice had no money. Soon, Angelo's clothes were full of . . . (You guessed it! Holes!)

One day Angelo got an idea. He thought that he could sell holes if he wrapped something around them. Meanwhile, back at the house, Mrs. Apice was busy making Italian breadsticks when Angelo rushed in and grabbed the breadsticks. An hour later after finally getting the breadsticks around the holes, "Eureka!" Angelo's product was very successful. People came from far and wide to test the doughnuts. Angelo also sold coffee so that they would have something to dunk their doughnuts in. Today, doughnuts are used for such things as ring-toss games and for toy automobiles, but most of all doughnuts are used to keep us happy (Pilon, 1985, pp. 246-247).

Because verbally gifted children value word play, it is important that they explore materials that will take advantage of this interest. Shakespeare has said, "The play's the thing," and, indeed, the play, for verbally gifted students, is the thing!

## Concrete Poetry

One wonderful way to encourage children to explore words and to play with them is through the use of concrete poetry. Not only will children be utilizing higher level thinking skills (analysis and synthesis) when they are working with concrete poetry, but by using this genre, teachers can encourage their students to become fluent.

Concrete poetry has several distinct characteristics, but the one that I want to single out here concerns the sounds of words. Included are some poems to read to students. They should be told that in these examples of concrete poetry the words do not rhyme. Students should listen closely to the poems to see if they can decide what word game the poet is playing. Read the words, enunciating them clearly when you present them. Do not read the title of the poems, "Names from One to Ten." After listening to the poems, let the children *see* them and discuss with the children what the poet was doing.

No. Fun

Names from One to Ten

| Girls' Names | Boys' Names |
|---|---|
| Wonda | Juan |
| Tonia | Thorley |
| Theresa | Tremaine |
| Florence | Vaughn |
| Viola | Farley |
| Sissy | Sid |
| Cecily | Severin |
| Ada | Abe |
| Nina | Niles |
| Terry | Ted |

(Pilon, 1972, p.28). (Pilon, 1979, p.149).

Order (Nearly), Order (Narrowly) Ordinarily

firth
section
thirst
fort
sickle
fib
severance
ate
night
tent

-A. Barbara Pilon

worn
toot
treat
fall
fire
sit
cellar
heir
knive
tenor

-A. Barbara Pilon

After the children have discovered that the author was trying to count from one to ten and first to tenth without actually using the words "one" to "ten," and "first" to "tenth," suggest doing some poems together. Brainstorm with the children words that sound like "one" to "ten" and "first" to "tenth," and record their answers on the board. Encourage as many responses as possible! In fact, start with several poems at once. For example, if you start with words from "one" to "ten," or names of girls from

"one" to "ten," divide the board into as many sections as the children have ideas for. Do not forget to add your own ideas.

> once warm worn won wan want wander want, etc.
> true toot tooth tool tutor truth troup tulle, etc.
> Oona Eunice Anna Wanda Juanita, etc.

This type of activity makes students aware of the many ways words with similar sounds can be spelled. It also is an activity that motivates children and their teachers to scurry eagerly to their dictionaries to find more words to use in their poems and to verify words that others are using in their writings.

The possibilities for word play with concrete poetry are endless. Students should be encouraged to write poems from one to ten for anything they have knowledge about – songs, baseball players, dogs, flowers, trees, fruits, vegetables.

I would like to close by quoting the late Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda (1977), who eulogized words in his book, *Memoirs*:

> You can say anything you want, yes sir but it's the words that sing, they soar and descend . . . I bow to them . . . I love them, I cling to them, I run them down, I bite into them, I melt them down . . . I love words so much . . . The ones I wait for greedily or stalk until suddenly, they drop . . . Vowels I love . . . They glitter like colored stones, they leap like silver fish, they are foam, thread, metal, dew . . . I run after certain words . . . They are so beautiful that I want to fit them into all my poems . . . I catch them in midflight, as they buzz past, I trap them, clean them, peel them, I set myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline texture to me, vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae, like agates, like olives . . . And then I stir them, I shake them, I drink them, I gulp them down, I mash them, I garnish them, I let them go . . . I leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished wood, like coals, pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves . . . Everything exists in the word.

## Language and Mind Muscle Books for Children

The following list of materials to enhance the characteristics of the verbally gifted is not exhaustive, but should whet your appetite.


Alda, A. (1981). *Arlene Alda's ABC*. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts.

Angrave, B. (1978). *Magnifi-cat*. New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation.

Cole, W. (1979). *Knock Knocks*. New York: Dell Publishing Company.

Cosgrove, P. & Hussar, L. (1980). *Abuse This Word*. New York: Avon Books.

Delacorte, P., & Witte, M.C. (1978). *The Book of Terms*. New York: Penguin Books.

Halperin, E., Halperin, J., & Kohutek, N. (1979). *Symbol Simons*. New York: Wandering Books.

Juster, N., & Carle, E. (1982). *Otter Nonsense*. New York: Philomel Books.

McMillan, B. (1977). *The Alphabet Symphony*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

McMillan, B. (1978). *Punography*. New York: Penguin Books.

McMillan, B. (1980). *Punography Too*. New York: Penguin Books.

Moscovitch, R. (1985). *What's in a Word?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Rosenbloom, J. (1986). *696 School Jokes and Riddles*. Sterling Publishing Company, New York.

Shannon, G. (1985). *Stories to Solve*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Thaler, M. (1980). *Mike Thaler's Complete Cootie Book*. New York: Avon Books.

Treat, L. (1982). *Crime and Puzzlement 2*. Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, Inc.

Treat, L. (1983). *You're the Detective*. Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, Inc.

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Guilford, J.P. (1967). Frontiers in thinking that teachers should know about. In J.C. Gowan, G.D. Demos, & E.P. Torrance. (Eds.), *Creativity: its educational implications* (p. 154). New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Merriam, E. (1962). *There is no rhyme for silver*. New York: Atheneum.

Neruda, P. (1977). *Memoirs*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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